

I CLAIM:

1. A method for providing bonus jackpot payoffs during a bonus mode time period in a system of linked gaming machines interconnected to a controller, said method comprising the steps of:

5 determining eligible gaming machines at the time the bonus time period starts,

providing bonus rounds in the controller wherein each bonus round has a different bonus multiplier and wherein each bonus round has a different predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities corresponding to the bonus multiplier for each bonus round,

10 randomly selecting in the controller eligible gaming machines in each bonus round,

issuing at most the predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities during each bonus round from the controller to the randomly selected eligible gaming machines,

15 the controller awarding each randomly selected eligible gaming machine a bonus jackpot payoff based on (1) the issued bonus multiplier opportunity and (2) a game payoff resulting from play of a game in each aforesaid gaming machine only when the play of the game results in a game payoff.

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2. The method of Claim 1 further comprising the steps of:

starting the bonus time period when a bonus pool of monetary value occurs,

5 decrementing the monetary value in the bonus pool by each bonus jackpot payoff awarded,

ending the bonus time period when the monetary value in the bonus pool drops below a predetermined low value.

3. The method of Claim 2 wherein the predetermined low value is zero.

4. The method of Claim 1 wherein the bonus multiplier is different for each successive bonus round.

5. The method of Claim 1 wherein the predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities is different for each successive bonus round.

6. The method of Claim 1 further comprising the step of displaying eligibility status in a display at an eligible gaming machine prior to the start of the bonus mode time period.

7. The method of Claim 1 wherein the step of determining eligibility depends on whether any of the linked gaming machines are in play or within a predetermined time period after play has ended.

8. The method of Claim 1 wherein the step of determining eligibility determines whether any of the linked gaming machines have player cards inserted.

9. The method of Claim 1 wherein the step of determining eligibility determines whether any of the linked gaming machines have maximum wager bet.

10. The method of Claim 1 wherein the step of determining eligibility determines whether any of the linked gaming machines have a separate wager bet.

11. The method of Claim 1 further comprising the step of ending a bonus round when the predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities for the aforesaid round have been issued.

12. The method of Claim 1 wherein the predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities for a bonus round is randomly selected in a predetermined range of numbers.

13. The method of Claim 1 further comprising the step of randomly selecting the number of bonus rounds at the start of the bonus mode time period in a predetermined range of numbers.

14. The method of Claim 1 wherein the bonus multiplier increases for each successive bonus round and wherein the predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities decreases for each next bonus round.

15. The method of Claim 1 further comprising the step of determining bonus round eligible gaming machines at the time each bonus round starts.

16. The method of Claim 12 further comprising the step of displaying bonus mode time period eligibility status in a display at the eligible gaming machine during play of the eligible gaming machine during the bonus mode time period.

17. The method of Claim 1 wherein any awarded bonus jackpot payoff does not exceed a maximum value.

18. The method of Claim 1 wherein any awarded bonus jackpot payoff award is made for only designated lower valued game payoffs.

5 19. The method of Claim 1 further comprising the step of displaying the random selection of an eligible gaming machine in a display at the aforesaid randomly selected gaming machine during the bonus time period thereby indicating the receipt of an issued bonus multiplier opportunity.

20. The method of Claim 1 further comprising the step of displaying the award of a bonus jackpot payoff at the randomly selected gaming machine during the bonus time period.

21. The method of Claim 1 further comprising the step of indicating at each eligible gaming machine the bonus multiplier opportunity.

22. The method of Claim 1 wherein the step of randomly selecting occurs at the start of a game in the eligible gaming machine.

23. The method of Claim 22 wherein the step of random selecting is static and occurs at a rate of every one out of a predetermined number of game starts in the eligible gaming machines during the bonus mode time period.

24. The method of Claim 22 wherein the step of random selecting is dynamic and occurs at a rate of every one of N game starts during the bonus mode time period where N is the number of eligible machines so as to increase randomness.

25. A method for providing bonus payoffs during a bonus mode time period in a system of linked gaming machines interconnected to a controller, said method comprising the steps of:

providing a fixed number of bonus rounds,

5 assigning a bonus multiplier for each of the fixed number of bonus rounds,

providing a predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities for each of said fixed number of bonus rounds, each bonus multiplier opportunity corresponding to the bonus multiplier
10 assigned for each bonus round,

starting the bonus mode time period with a bonus pool of monetary value,

determining eligible gaming machines in the linked gaming machines at the time the bonus mode time period starts,

15 each bonus round comprising the following steps:

(a) detecting when an eligible gaming machine starts a game,

(b) randomly selecting the detected eligible gaming machine to receive a bonus multiplier opportunity,

20 (c) awarding the randomly selected gaming machine a bonus jackpot payoff based on (1) the bonus multiplier assigned to the received bonus multiplier opportunity and (2) a game payoff resulting from play of the game,

(d) deducting the awarded bonus jackpot payoff value from
25 the monetary value of the bonus pool,

(e) ending the aforesaid bonus round when all of the predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities are received by the selected gaming machines,

30 ending the bonus mode time period when all of the fixed number of bonus rounds have occurred or when the monetary value in the bonus pool drops below a predetermined low value.

26. The method of Claim 25 wherein the predetermined low value is zero.

27. The method of Claim 25 wherein the predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities is randomly selected in a predetermined range of numbers.

28. The method of Claim 25 wherein the bonus multiplier increases for each successive bonus round and wherein the predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities decreases for each successive bonus round.

29. The method of Claim 25 wherein any awarded bonus jackpot payoff award does not exceed a maximum value.

30. The method of Claim 25 wherein any awarded bonus jackpot payoff award is made for only designated lower valued game payoffs.

31. The method of Claim 25 wherein the step of randomly selecting occurs at the start of a game in the eligible gaming machine.

32. The method of Claim 25 wherein the step of random selecting is static and occurs every one out of a predetermined number of game starts in the eligible gaming machines during the bonus mode time period.

33. The method of Claim 25 wherein the step of random selecting is dynamic and occurs every one of N game starts during the bonus mode time period where N is the number of eligible gaming machines so as to increase randomness.

34. The method of Claim 25 further comprising the steps of: continuing play of any selected gaming machines when the bonus mode time period ends and preparing only steps (c) and (d) in the event such continued play results in a game payoff.

35. A method for providing bonus payoffs during a bonus mode time period in a system of linked gaming machines interconnected to a controller, said method comprising the steps of:

5 providing in the controller a fixed number of bonus rounds,
 assigning in the controller a bonus multiplier for each of the
fixed number of bonus rounds,

 providing in the controller a predetermined number of bonus
multiplier opportunities for each of said fixed number of bonus rounds,
each bonus multiplier opportunity corresponding to the bonus
10 multiplier assigned for each bonus round, wherein the bonus multiplier
increases for each successive bonus round and wherein the
predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities decreases for
each successive bonus round,

 starting the bonus mode time period with a bonus pool of
15 monetary value,

 determining eligible gaming machines at the time the bonus
mode time period starts,

 each bonus round comprising the following steps:

20 (a) detecting when an eligible gaming machine starts a
game,

- (b) randomly selecting the detected eligible gaming machine to receive a bonus multiplier opportunity in response to the start of the game,
- 25 (c) awarding the randomly selected gaming machine a bonus jackpot payoff determined by: (the bonus multiplier assigned to the received bonus multiplier opportunity minus one) times (a game payoff resulting from play of the game),
- 30 (d) deducting the awarded bonus jackpot payoff value from the monetary value of the bonus pool,
- (e) ending the aforesaid bonus round when all of the predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities are received by the selected gaming machines,
- 35 ending the bonus mode time period when all of the fixed number of bonus rounds have occurred or when the monetary value in the bonus pool drops below zero,
- continuing play of any selected gaming machines when the bonus mode time period ends, and
- performing only steps (c) and (d) in the event such continued
- 40 play results in a game payoff.

36. The method of Claim 35 wherein any awarded bonus jackpot payoff award is made for only designated lower valued game payoffs.

37. The method of Claim 35 wherein the step of random selecting is static and occurs every one out of a predetermined number of game starts in the eligible gaming machines during the bonus mode time period.

38. The method of Claim 35 wherein the step of randomly selecting is dynamically weighted and occurs every one of N game starts during the bonus mode time period where N is the number of eligible machines.

39. A method of controlling the length of the average bonus mode time period for a bonus game having a plurality of linked eligible gaming machines interconnected to a controller, said bonus mode time period funded by a bonus pool of monetary value, said method comprising the steps of:

5 providing to the controller at least the following values: (1) a fixed number of bonus rounds, (2) a bonus multiplier for each of the fixed number of bonus rounds, (3) a predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities for each of the fixed number of bonus rounds,
10 each bonus multiplier opportunity corresponding to the bonus multiplier assigned for each bonus round, and (4) a random selection rate for each bonus round for delivering a bonus multiple opportunity to each eligible gaming machine at the start of a game in the aforesaid each eligible gaming machine, the aforesaid values
15 controlling the average length of the bonus mode time period,

playing the bonus game from the controller by issuing bonus multiplier opportunities to each eligible gaming machine at the start of each game so as to be sure the predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities for each bonus round is the fixed number of
20 bonus rounds,

ending the bonus mode time period when all of the fixed number of bonus rounds have occurred or when the monetary value in the bonus pool drops below a predetermined value.

40. The method of Claim 39 further comprising the step of:
providing in the controller a transition time between bonus
rounds.

41. The method of Claim 40 further comprising the step of:
presenting a multimedia presentation during the transition time
announcing the next bonus round.

42. The method of Claim 39 wherein the value of the bonus
multiplier increases each successive bonus round.

43. The method of Claim 39 wherein the value of the bonus
multiplier opportunities decreases each successive bonus round.

44. The method of Claim 39 wherein the value of the
random selection rate is static.

45. The method of claim 39 wherein the value of the random
selection rate is a number of eligible gaming machines at the start of
the bonus mode time period so as to increase randomness.

46. A method for awarding bonus jackpot payoffs to winning
gaming machines during a bonus mode time period, each of the
plurality of gaming machines having a pay table of winning
combinations with game payoffs, said method comprising the steps of:

5 selecting winning combinations with game payoffs in the pay
table having game payoffs below a predetermined value,

 providing bonus multiples of the game payoffs corresponding
to the selected winning combinations as the bonus jackpot payoffs,

10 awarding the provided bonus mode jackpot payoffs to the
winning gaming machines with the selected winning combinations.

47. A method of controlling the length of the average bonus mode time period for a bonus game having a plurality of linked eligible gaming machines interconnected to a controller, said method comprising the steps of:

5 providing a predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities, each bonus multiplier opportunity having an assigned multiplier, and

 delivering the bonus multiplier opportunities at a random selection rate from the controller to the eligible gaming machines
10 wherein only the randomly selected ones of the eligible gaming machines receive multiples of their game payoffs so as to control the average length of the bonus mode time period,

 ending the bonus mode time period at least when all of the bonus multiplier opportunities have been delivered.

48. The method of Claim 47 further comprising the step of providing a fixed number of bonus rounds wherein said predetermined number of bonus multiplier opportunities are allocated among the fixed number of bonus rounds.

49. The method of Claim 48 wherein the assigned multipliers for the allocated bonus multiplier opportunities in a bonus round have the same multiplier value.